

Our Greatest Generation Veterans –health/ psyche/social needs

Good day, my name is Lyndsey Hale, I am a Military Spouse, the 2nd Vice for the American Legion Auxiliary unit 741, a Ventura County Military Collaborative Board Member, and a Veterans Liaison for a hospice provider.

Regarding mental health and resources for our veterans it is especially meaningful for those veterans who left comrades on the field of battle as they enter their senior years or near end of life.

There is a quote from Will Rogers that goes, "We can't all be heroes, some of us have to sit on the curb and clap as they go by." Although in more recent years we do our share of "clapping", recognizing and honoring our veteran, we need to do more to provide the resources and support for our veterans in regards to mental and spiritual health particularly as they near end of life.

I know that we do not see ourselves as a "warrior" nation. However, over the years we have been thrust into numerous conflicts during which we have always had those willing to answer the call of their country. Many of those never returned alive.

There are over 21 mil living Veterans, 45% of which are over 65 years old. – according to www.census.gov

As a Military Spouse, daughter of a Vietnam era veteran, and granddaughter of WWII veterans, I am humbled to be able to speak in regards to the need for resources and support for our veterans of any age, and particularly to advocate today for our elderly veterans. In the American Legion Auxiliary outreach and in working in hospice I hear many stories from veterans that they have never told or not brought up in years. These veterans of war are holding memories of horrors one, like myself, who has not seen battle, can comprehend.

I was speaking to a WWII veteran, a Pearl Harbor Survivor, who told me he had three times been spared his life during WWII while he watched his comrades in arms die. While he had to pick up their remains and count the bodies... He told me that the third time his life was spared he was on a ship at sea and had just left his post to run back to the galley for coffee... while he was in the galley the ship was attacked. Later as he was walking the ship with a Lieutenant, and pulling dog tags of those that had been killed he came to his post where he should have been, and there in his place was the lower half of a mans body... the man covering his seat was litterly cut in half by the explosion from the torpedo that hit the ship. He said he started laughing hysterically at this point as he just lost it. His Lieutenant then slapped him in the face to bring him back to

reality... This WWII hero told me he would never forget those images and that now as he is in his late 90's they come to him more and more.

This is just one of many stories I have heard. Other stories involve questions and remorse for those they may have killed in battle... These WWII veterans wonder what will come of their souls as they leave this life. I believe our veterans often just need to get these stories off their chests... things they have never spoken of to anyone for fear of the judgment that would follow. I can't tell you how many times I have heard a spouse say, yes he served in the War, but he never talks about it. PTSD is a common term these days that we are trying hard to address and assist our returning troops with. I personally have had many a friend come home in recent years broken from war. We need to continue to support and grow our resources for our military and veterans of recent war. In saying that, we can not forget the veterans of our past wars such as our WWII vets. They came home to a nation as heroes, yes, but there was no diagnosis for their mental well being, there was no 'PTSD' support... often they just stifled it, at times self medicated and moved on. The bonus for this WWII and Korean Conflict generation was that many of our men and families were touched by it or involved directly in it and so they had comfort in numbers. However, as this tough proud generation ages they have questions and fears they have never been able to address.

As an American Legion Auxiliary Member I know that our American Legionnaires & Auxiliary members are constantly seeking better ways to reach out to our Veterans and get them information on programs such as the We Honor Veterans Program, the 'Spirit of '45 movement, resources such as the local VetCenter and County Veterans Service Office to help bring support to our greatest generation, but we need more awareness and support in our health care community and the general public. I ask you today to help find away to reach out to our Greatest Generation veterans and let them know there are support and resources for them too and that it is okay to talk about their time in the service.

Thank you for your time and attention to these matters and your work on making a difference in the lives of our Veterans and families.

~Lyndsey N. Hale